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SUBJECT: CAMEROON REACTS TO ATTACK ALONG NIGERIAN BORDER

REF A. Yaounde 1349 (NOTAL)  
REF B. Yaounde 1353 (NOTAL)  
REF C. IIR 6 825 0004 08 (NOTAL)

¶1. (U) The Government of Cameroon (GRC) issued a November 13 statement in response to the November 12 attack that, at last count, killed 21 and injured 10 Cameroonian soldiers at a military post on the Bakassi Peninsula in the riverine border with Nigeria. The statement (full text below) deplored the "intolerable barbarian act" that "deteriorated the climate of serenity" which had thus far characterized the handover of the disputed peninsula from Nigeria to Cameroon in keeping with the 2006 UN-brokered Greentree Accords.

¶2. (U) Cameroonian public and press have reacted with shock and dismay at the incident. The government-owned Cameroon Tribune ran a full-page headline decrying "Barbarism and Betrayal in Bakassi" and other journals followed suit. Early press speculation that the Nigerian army was involved has quickly been put to rest. The BBC's stringer in Yaounde reported that Cameroonian military authorities claimed the assailants wore Nigerian military uniforms when they attacked a Cameroonian vessel and then donned Cameroonian uniforms to attack the Cameroonian outpost. The November 14 edition of privately-owned journal Le Mesager reports (without attribution) that senior Cameroonian army officials "suspect" Nigerian army elements were behind the attack. In a November 14 conversation with Poloff, a senior government contact at Cameroon's Presidency said the GRC was confident the Nigerian military was not implicated. More recent news reports have dropped any suggestion that the Nigerian military was involved and have focused on the belief that rebel elements from the Niger Delta were behind the attack.

¶3. (U) Privately-owned newspaper Mutations headlined a story alleging that Cameroonian military units had been engaged in arms-trafficking to paramilitary groups based in Nigeria. According to this story, which as also reported by Radio France International and other news outlets, the Cameroonian military was investigating allegations that Cameroonian military elements posted in Bakassi had trafficked arms to the Nigeria-based paramilitary groups. According to this story, the Cameroonian units under suspicion, in an effort to shore up their bona fides, captured seven members of a paramilitary group sometime in the week of November 5. The paramilitary group responded with the November 12 attack.

¶4. (U) According to press reports, the attack began when a Cameroonian military vessel carrying food and supplies to military outposts in the Bakassi peninsula was attacked by an armed group dressed in Nigerian military uniforms and operating in speedboats. The attackers overwhelmed the vessel and donned the Cameroonian uniforms before attacking the Cameroonian outpost "C3." At last count, 21 Cameroonian soldiers had been killed and ten wounded, of which five critically, and 7 civilians were reported killed in the fighting. Cameroonian forces reportedly sank one of the attacking

vessels and killed 10 of the attackers.

15. (SBU) Comment. Cameroon is still in a state of shock over the incident. Speculation is running wild and official, verifiable information is hard to come by. At this point we do not have information to confirm or deny any of the speculative scenarios, but we remain confident that Nigerian military elements were not involved. We will continue to seek further information on the event and look for ways to identify a silver lining (like closer Cameroon-Nigeria cooperation, improved training, etc.) in this tragic event. End comment.

16. (U) Begin text of the Government of Cameroon's November 13 statement.

On November 12, 2007, a post of our defense forces in the Bakassi peninsula located at the confluence of the Rio del Rey and Isangele creek was attacked by a group of individuals without apparent military uniforms. This intolerable barbarian act has deteriorated the climate of serenity which has reigned on the peninsula since the beginning of the withdrawal of the Nigerian troops pursuant to the Greentree agreement. In fact, as part of this agreement, the focus of our defense forces stationed in Bakassi is currently on civilian actions intended for the construction and the rehabilitation of social infrastructures to improve the living conditions of the populations.

In the same way, sea transportation facilities have been made available to enable business persons and inhabitants to carry on their activities freely. Taking advantage of the said facilities in a treacherous manner, the attackers were able to approach the post named C3 sailing on board seven (7) fast boats, opened fire, killing 21 men among our soldiers and injuring 10. During the response, 10 attackers were shot dead and one of their boats was destroyed. An

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investigation has been opened in order to determine where the attackers came from and specify all details concerning this incident. Urgent steps have been taken by the major command for the evacuation of the remains, the medical care of the injured soldiers in Douala hospitals and for families concerned to be informed. The President of the Republic, chief of the armed forces, has expressed his deepest condolences to the families of the victims and has reaffirmed the authority of the State of Cameroon on the Bakassi peninsula, in which order and safety will continue to be provided.

/signed/

Laurent Esso  
Minister of State  
Secretary General of the Presidency of the Republic

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End text of the Government of Cameroon's November 13 statement.

Garvey.